MATWATCH EXTRA

ATLANTA - In a stunning series of events, Dusty Rhodes has apparently been ashcanned as booker for Ted Turner's National Wrestling Alliance. No replacement has been formally named but the move follows a week of tense sessions in the Turner Broadcasting headquarters in Georgia.

Rhodes was apparently given the word either Sunday or Monday by TBS NWA guru Jack Petrik after missing shows on consecutive nights in Washington, Philadelphia, and Chicago. On at least one of the shows, Rhodes was booked in an NWA world title match against Ric Flair.

While the inner politics have been working overtime since Turner's official takeover Nov. 1, the move to oust Rhodes was expedited after a controversial session Nov. 14 when a discussion ensued concerning the finish of the Flair-Lex Luger main event at STARRCADE '88 Dec. 26 in Norfolk. Rhodes apparently wanted Flair to drop the belt. The champion, who has been given a stronger power base, as well as a six-figure contract by Turner officials, was incensed and walked out of the meeting. Flair also missed the TBS tapings that night and threatened to bolt the promotion.

Petrik returned Flair to the fold the next day and insiders say Petrik overruled Rhodes' decision Thursday. The official line given to most of the NWA wrestlers, including two insiders we have talked with, is that Rhodes was ill. But as one insider told MATWATCH, "I've seen Dusty when he's had a 104-degree temperature and he'd still show up."

Most observers say Petrik was also *incensed* over chaotic travel plans for the wrestlers and the fact that allegedly, Jim Crockett, Rhodes, and J.J. Dillon had blamed problems on the TBS organization. In addition, Rhodes had brought in Ray Candy & Grizzly Boone as The Commandos to wrestle on the TBS morning program which aired last Saturday. Reportedly, no one in authority at TBS knew about that move (Boone & Candy had been working for Jerry Blackwell's Atlanta-based Southern promotion, which is currently on hiatus. Plus, the move of Dusty to bring in his son Dustin, only 13 weeks after he began with the fledgling Florida promotion reportedly did not set well throughout the company.

Reportedly Tuesday, Rhodes was offered an opportunity to stay with the NWA as a wrestler with no authority in the promotion. However, many insiders believe he will not accept the proposal. Rhodes is said to have told several people he plans to meet with Vince McMahon to discuss a possible move to the WWF, which would go against the grain of experts who have believed Rhodes will never be hired by McMahon.

As for a replacement, one option being explored but not yet adopted is a booking "committee," on which Jim Cornette, Jim Ross, Barry Windham, Ric Flair and even Eddie Gilbert have been mentioned as possible members. The majority of those five have no knowledge of such a proposal, MATWATCH has learned.

In the short term, if Rhodes leaves, this does affect the Dec. 7 SEASON'S BEATINGS on TBS, during which Rhodes was expected to set up the TRUE GRITT title angle for STARRCADE. The inside word is that Road Warrior Animal was to "inflict serious damage" to Rhodes' eye, which would have forced him to wrestle wearing a Rooster Cogburn-style patch. Late last week, a TBS official had indicated to me that the next three or four weeks would probably be difficult for the promotion but "we have to send a message to our people that no one is bigger than this company or the SuperStation. If that means we have some hard times to start with, fine. But we'll be better off in the long run."

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MATWATCH

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MATWATCH EDITORIAL:
OUR CHOICE FOR NWA BOOKER

In our 21 issues, MATWATCH has offered personal commentary but no institutional editorial advocating a specific change or stance within an organization. Our reluctance to do so in this case stems from our TV AWARDS ballot containing a category on this issue. However, we urge our readers to vote their true opinion and not be influenced by this editorial.

Nevertheless, it is our feeling that a decision on the issue of NWA booker is one which cannot be eschewed. While MATWATCH has been at times highly critical of the recent creative work of Dusty Rhodes, the intent has not been to slight his career-long contribution to the industry, which has been immense and positive. One cannot doubt that his development of concepts such as WAR GAMES and THE GREAT AMERICAN BASH have been stamped in the memories of wrestling followers nationwide.

But MATWATCH believes that in any creative endeavor, five years---particularly in an entertainment genre that demands nightly conceptualization on a national front---is quite long enough to ride the helm. In TV history, Jess Oppenheimer, the creator of I LOVE LUCY, walked away after three intense years. DICK VAN DYKE ended his classic series of the '60s after five seasons for fear of staleness. He was probably right.

It is our belief that Jack Petrik of TBS and whomever he names as operations manager of the NWA must address this situation quickly to stem discontent within the talent base and freshen perspective of drama and soap opera content.

Accordingly, MATWATCH nominates what may be considered a surprising choice, considering current speculation. While we would love to see Bill Watts take the helm, we believe Watts does not have the interest at this time. Eddie Gilbert would not be an unwise choice; however, his newness to the NWA and controversy surrounding his CWF tenure probably renders his selection too early.

Accordingly, MATWATCH has chosen to nominate a man we believe has as much knowledge and common sense within the wrestling industry as any active performer today. A man who certainly, we feel, understands the crying need to restore dignity and respect to the alliance's world title. A man who certainly has had a chance to "go to school," as he often says on some classic mistakes in the last two years, of note.

MATWATCH makes a strong suggestion that RIC FLAIR be given at least the first opportunity to refuse the job. While we understand Flair has few enemies within the profession and while the thanklessness of the job and its anger-inducing quality is comparable to that of assignment editor in a television newsroom, MATWATCH feels Flair as booker may be what is best for the NWA, for several reasons: (1) Flair understands the need for drama, personality and the continuing story. In the best years of Flair, he was a textbook example; (2) Flair understands TV and is still probably one of the great telegenic performers of our day; and (3) giving Ric the creative helm may be what it takes to cement him in the NWA---still a crucial element at this point.

MATWATCH also believes no finer choice for an assistant booker (and perhaps the top man if Flair were to refuse) can be found than in JIM CORNETTE. Much of the recent ROAD WARRIORS' title change match in New Orleans and the ORIGINAL MIDNIGHT EXPRESS attack was developed by Cornette and it is our view that he understands fully how wrestling angles need a personal sense in order to get over today.

Both of these choices go against our inherent grain that the NWA booker should not be an active performer. But a fresh focus is the key and we believe strongly that these two gentlemen have the ability to provide it. In addition, JIM ROSS possesses one of the fine creative minds in the business and we feel he understands acutely the need to keep wrestling a form the entire family can enjoy.

MATWATCH strongly urges the TBS organization, which is in the midst of a critical transition, to give urgent consideration to these proposals, remembering as they do in their entire business, that the choice of booker should not be what is best for one individual but what is best for TBS, the NWA and their respective audiences.

RATINGS RAP
(Weekend Ending October 9)

	Rating	Stations	Pct. U.S.
WWF	9.2	254	97%
NWA	5.2	146	90%

(ANALYSIS: Both figures really flat from Oct. 2 and Sept. 25 so no real trend. The WWF pulled a 9.4 for Oct. 16 -- no NWA figures yet and the ALL-PRO NETWORK numbers have not been available for 3 weeks.)

C O M I N G S & G O I N G S !!!!

---Tim Horner's move to the WWF will likely be in a jobber role or similar to the Sam Houston position. We were told there was no animosity over his CWF departure and David Woods wished him well.

---The reason the STARRCADE '88 card has not been officially announced is as I suspected: it's still in revision. I talked with TBS/NWA people last Thursday and they say the first matches won't be promoted until---at the earliest---this weekend. I'll put it this way, one more time: if Flair-Luger is on top, it won't sell.

---An absolutely looney situation on the NWA tour last week. As a cost-cutting measure, some of the managers are not being sent to the shows. But the decision was left in the hands of J.J. Dillon as to WHICH managers made this week's towns. Bottom line: J.J. left JIM CORNETTE and PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY off of several shows when they have potentially the hottest feud in the promotion. DANGEROUSLY, in fact, was left off of Chicago, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Norfolk---the latter on the last card there before STARRCADE. Is this J.J.'s attempt to keep the two hottest managers from getting over??? Jack Petrik ought to look into this pronto. It's spelled D-U-M!

---The ROAD WARRIORS were said to be fuming over PAUL ELLERING being left off several shows. One insider said, "Nobody went near the ROAD WARRIORS after the Wednesday night syndication taping."

---Another crack in the Verne Gagne pay-per-boo: RONNIE GARVIN has jumped to the WWF, reportedly for a Dec. 1 start. So GROOVY GREG needs a new date for the prom.

---WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING will move to a permanent new time on TBS, likely 7:05 (ET), beginning JAN. 7. TBS is making way for a new sports anthology series, U.S. OLYMPIC GOLD in the traditional 6:05 wrestling slot. TBS program exec Jeff Carr tells me the SuperStation is still committed to a 2-hour show for WCW.

---RATINGS RAP AGAIN: The WWF ELECTION NIGHT SPECIAL on USA did a 3.6 rating and 5.3 share. That's barely half a point up from its PRIME TIME average. The Nov. 5 Saturday WCW on TBS with the DANGEROUSLY/CORNETTE angle posted a 2.8, up over its quarterly average. If the word-of-mouth has spread from that angle, last Saturday's show should have topped a 3.0. The NWA MAIN EVENT did a 2.3 nationally Nov. 6.

---In addition to FLAIR & WINDHAM vs. EATON & LANE on the Dec. 7 TBS CLASH IV, the semi-final is ROAD WARRIOR ANIMAL vs. DUSTY RHODES. I wonder who gets cheered.

---TITAN SPORTS is claiming a record $19 million gross on the Leonard-Lalonde fight but, again, doubt is cast. The 650,000 homes would come out to about a 5.8% buy-rate but I've had two cable operators strongly question that figure.

---PAUL E. wanted to do a retake on his first NWA interview Saturday because of his throat infection but was told his hoarseness added to the intensity. On an upcoming WORLD WIDE show, expect a line involving Dangerously, TONY SCHIAVONE & DAVID CROCKETT that will leave you howling.

---The CORNETTE interview Saturday will be considered a classic, in my view, particularly when those tears fall. This feud is going to be interesting!

---Black Bart joins the CWF. He'll be an acceptable journeyman but people won't be flocking to the box office for him.

---That Junkfood Dog match on Vince's Election Night special was horrible! Reportedly, Buck Robley is after JFD for some independent shows in the Mid-South.

---Jerry Blackwell is virtually shutting down for the next 45 days, except for a few scattered spot shows. SCW has taped three weeks of TV and will tape three more Dec. 4. Blackwell and Tommy Rich are in Japan.

---I'm hearing BRIAN PILLMAN may end up in the NWA, which is good news and I'm also told the BRITISH BULLDOGS are under consideration. Several smaller groups are after the KILLER BEES.

---By now, you've heard of KERRY VON ERICH's tasteless announcement of his divorce before his Nov. 4 match with Jerry Lawler, when he said he'd "be in the back taking names and phone numbers after the match." With that kind of mentality, any wonder World Class is in the shape it is???

---Columnist RICHARD HYATT says IVAN KOLOFF does the best JAY SILVERHEELS imitation since Tonto left TV.

PINFALL PROFILE: SURVIVOR SERIES II

To tell the honest truth, I did enjoy SURVIVOR SERIES I, even though I didn't cotton to the turmoil around the PPV wars for Thanksgiving night between the WWF and NWA last year.

Even though the match became predictable, my attention was genuinely captivated in the finale watching BAM BAM BIGELOW try to take on three giant behemoths in what was certain to end in victory for ANDRE THE GIANT. Accordingly, with the apparent success of that event, it still has me puzzled why BAM BAM ultimately did not get over with the Titan troops.

This year, I can't say I am looking on with much anticipation to this. Maybe it's because there have been a glut of PPV events this year; maybe it's that I don't care nearly as much about the WWF characters as I did even in 1986; perhaps we've been anticipating so highly the coming switchover of the NWA to Ted Turner that we haven't been able to concentrate that well on an event that cost Jim Crockett serious money twelve months ago and probably set him on his sellout spiral.

But tell me if I am wrong not to get highly emotional over a tag team of survivors which includes Hillbilly Jim and Koko B. Ware in the windup. I still believe the only reason Koko is in the WWF is to sing on the Slammys and I'd as soon see Mighty Wilbur as his ancestor.

One scenario which an insider has laid out for me is a potential turn of Hulk Hogan at this event to set up a four-month buildup for a Hogan-Savage showdown at WRESTLEMANIA IV. And maybe a shot in the arm needed for Titan is its standardbearing star to switch image almost in the same fashion as, on a much smaller scale, Tommy Rich has in the Southern promotion.

But I wouldn't lay Las Vegas odds on that happening. For one thing, I believe the pay-cable push would be much stronger than it is for a major turn to be guaranteed and, second, even though I believe the Hogan era has ended, Hulk isn't going to turn unless he wants to.

Interestingly, doesn't it seem ironic that on Thanksgiving night, Tully & Arn are the last-billed duo in a tag team survival match where one team is captained by the POWERS OF PAIN???

At least with 10-20 guys in there, the action doesn't slow to the level of recycled restholds. But unless a clear-cut angle comes out of this thing, the results are probably as meaningless as in any PPV event, short of THE BUNKHOUSE (hopefully R.I.P.) STAMPEDE.

I simply don't feel any organization can turn over two successful pay-cable cards in 2½ weeks even if the audiences are from different demographics. I could be wrong but I think the leftover turkey will hold a lot more attention this year.

THE SCREENING ROOM: "THEY LIVE"

The Rowdy One's big screen debut has mixed a pot for revievers across the country. We've seen ratings from one to four stars for THEY LIVE, may citing its potential as a political and social commentary but faulting John Carpenter's film for falling short.

The film's basic premise is that we've all been brainwashed by extraterrestrials using the greenhouse effect to turn the Earth into a replica of their own polluted environment. Piper, as John Nada, is a drifter who is exposed to various vignettes which amplify problems America has faced in the last decades of the 20th century.

Some reviews of Piper's performance:

USA TODAY: "The worst part of the entire film was when Carpenter gives us ten minutes of unexplained violence, surely to please those fans in Piper's wrestling audience."

NEW YORK TIMES: "Roddy Piper plays his role like the former wrestler that he is....Mr. Piper...spends his time chasing around to not particular purpose, though he does announce with some enthusiasm that the nation needs a wakeup call, which he plans to deliver himself."

SEATTLE: "The first time script by Frank Armitage includes some howlingly bad dialog and Piper is so inexpressive, he makes it sound worse than it is."

Of course, THEY LIVE was the top box-office draw in the nation two weeks ago, pulling in $4.8 million worth of business. While that's not huge numbers for a week, it does suggest an initial curiousity in Piper's debut. My own view is that if Piper has better material and a strong supporting cast, he can sustain a limited, if not critically successful, film career.

TV TEMPO (Week Ending Nov. 13)

RATINGS: PINFALL! - Must See. PILEDRIVER - Excellent. POWERSLAM - Good. DRAW - Average. RESTHOLD - Fair. BOMB - Poor. PLUS - Midscale rating.

(MEMPHIS) - Sid Vicious d. Jim Long; Jerry Lawler/Jeff Jarrett d. Keith Eric/Al Woodard; Bill Dundee/Todd Morton d. Grim Reapers; Mike Miller debuts with squash win. ANGLE: STUD STABLE breaks up over who gets shot at world tag belts. Cactus Jack Foley/Gary Young/Downtown Bruno brawl with Robert Fuller & Jimmy Golden. DRAW-PLUS.

(WWC) - Bobby Jaggers d. Invader III; Batten Twins d. Mr. Pogo/Dr. Death; Jason the Terrible returns. DRAW.

(AWA & SCW) - Because of scheduling changes in our area, we will pick up results of these two groups next week.

(LTR) - The Randall family spruces up their home after their mother and wife calls to say she's returning home. Robert (Lyle Alzado) picks up a case of the mumps from his school and Larry Zbyszko brings over some "wrestler's soup," not as a get-well gift but in an effort to discover if he might catch the mumps from his recent match with The Masked Maniac (Alzado). In the end, Robert has to emotionally tell his kids that their mother has decided instead to take a job in London and won't return home. DRAW...not as silly as some past episodes but Larry Z's appearance was wasted.

(W. CLASS) - Black Bart d. Steve Casey; Steve Cox/Bill Irwin upset SST and Fatu shoves Buddy Roberts; From MEMPHIS: Jeff Jarrett d. Eric Embry using chain; Kendall Windham wins DQ over The Beast when Iceman Parsons runs in but Embry makes save; Kevin Von Erich wins DQ over Super Black Ninja when Kendo Nagasaki hits Kevin with kendo stick. INTERVIEW: Skandor Akbar announces $50,000 bounty on Embry plus return of Kamala. POWERSLAM.

(PWTW) - From California: FLAIR, Sunset Rose d. Randi Rocket; WCCW, Embry-Akbar angle; PORTLAND, Al Madril d. Top Gun with knucks in Mexican death match; MEMPHIS, Eddie Marlin holds up CWA tag belts; CWF, Danny Davis d. Grappler II by DQ when Ken Wayne runs in; SCW, Tommy Rich d. Bobby Bennett. INTERVIEWS: Boni Blackstone w. The Flame; Joe Pedicino w. Bobby Heenan; Joe announces DANGER ZONE is dropped because of Paul E. Dangerously's failure to deliver tapes for 3 weeks. MARS WRESTLER OF WEEK: Michael Hayes for run-in on Rich. DRAW-PLUS...FLAIR segment too long for 30 min. show.

(CWF) - Detroit Demolition/Kokina d. Lee Peek/Ronnie Thomas; Bullet Brad & Bullet Bob win DQ over Tony Anthony/Jerry Stubbs when Dutch Mantel leaves table, attacks both Armstrongs & unmasks Bullet; Tim Horner d. Mark Pyle; Super Dave Baxter d. Ed Franks; Johnny & Davey Rich d. J.D. Wolfe/Jerry Brown but are attacked after by Kokina, Demo, Pyle & Baxter but Willie B. Hart & Horner join in brawl. POWERSLAM.

(NWA/TBS) - [P.M.]: WORLD TV TITLE: Mike Rotundo d. David Isley; Ric Flair d. George South; Barry Windham d. Curtis Thompson; Original Midnight Express d. Jerry Price/Rick Allen; Other winners: Bam Bam Bigelow, Lex Luger, Abdullah the Butcher, Eddie Gilbert/Ron Simmons, Fantastics. ANGLE: After Windham taunts Bigelow at announcer's table, Bam Bam pops Barry and the two go at it for 3 minutes. Just as the Banner prepares to nuclear splash Barry, J.J. pulls him out of the ring. DRAW...details in PARTING BLOWS.
[A.M.]: Road Warriors d. Terry Jones/Bob Emery; Original Midnights d. Bob Riddle/Bob Holliday. Other winners: Sheepherders, Al Perez/Larry Zbyszko, Bigelow, Russian A's. BOMB-PLUS...still a throwaway.

(NWA/SYND.) - [WORLD WIDE]: U.S. TAG TOURNEY, Koloffs-Russian A's double countout to eliminate both teams; Kevin Sullivan/Rick Steiner d. Randy Hogan/Keith Steinborn. Other winners: Larry Z, Gilbert. STRAIGHT TALK: Magnum w. Sullivan/Steiner. RESTHOLD.
[NWA PRO]: Gilbert d. Mike Jackson; Steiner d. The Executioner; Other winners: Simmons, Cornette's Midnights, Road Warriors, Koloffs. LOUISVILLE SLUGGER: Cornette w. Simmons. BOMB.

(WWF) - [SUPERSTARS]: Rockers-Rougeaus double DQ when Jimmy Hart tosses in megaphone and Hart Foundation saves; Tully & Arn d. Al Kinsey/Mario Mancini; From Paris: Rockin' Robin d. Sherri Martel for WWF women's title; Other winners: Koko B. Ware, Hercules Hernandez, Akeem, Jim Duggan. BROTHER LOVE w. Jake Roberts. RESTHOLD.
[CHALLENGE]: Owen Hart Blazer d. Barry Horowitz; Greg Valentine vs. Bret Hart double countout when major brawl develops between Hart/Neidhart vs. Valentine & Rougeaus; Other winners: Ron Bass, Ricky Santana, Akeem, Ted DiBiase. INTERVIEW: Mean Gene w. the heel tag team of SURVIVOR SERIES. DRAW.

LINES OF THE WEEK - 1. Cornette, TBS, to Dangerously: "You're a cross between Michael Keaton & Jim Belushi with one of my jokebooks in your back pocket." 2. Dangerously, TBS: "Dennis carried you for 5 long years---and last week, Dennis & Randy carried you to the paramedic stand. 3. Jesse Ventura, WWF: "If you want grammar, McMahon, go read a love novel." 4. Jim Ross, TBS, on Sullivan's stare at Steiner: "What a caring look. It's like Robert Young on FATHER KNOWS BEST." 5. Simmons, NWA PRO: "Drugs are like being addicted & hooked on something...like you (Cornette) are to talking." 6. Cornette, NWA PRO: "In your football career, you (Simmons) were cut so many times, you were bleeding to death." 7. Ken Wayne, CWF: "That guy (Ed Franks) hit the bottom of Alan Martin's shoe with his head." 8. Ventura, WWF: "Who reffed this match (Rockers-Rougeaus)? Gorilla? 9. Road Warrior Hawk, TBS: "Sting, what you are is a Valley Girl's boyfriend." 10. Sullivan & Steiner, WORLD WIDE: (KEVIN): "This is where a brain is needed. (RICK): "I'm ready." 11. S&S, NWA PRO: (KEVIN): Nobody could defeat Dr. Death in 4 years of college." (RICK): "Without your genius...I got you on that one!" 12. Joe Pedicino, PWTW: "Bobby Heenan's policy is: just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they're not out to get you." 13. Ross, TBS: "If you need to adjust your set for a red hue, just use George South's chest for a gauge." 14. Dangerously, TBS: "If he (Cornette) had a phone, he might have called for a backup."

STRONGEST COMMENTS - 1. Cornette, TBS, on his mother's request for him to leave pro wrestling: "Mama, you're gonna have to get over it because it's about d--- time I did something on my own." 2. Ric Flair, TBS: "For several reasons--all of them personal---I detest Bam Bam Bigelow." 3. Charlie Platt, CWF: "I'm going to talk to the promotion about the calibre of individual they send out here to sit with me." 4. Vince McMahon, WWF: "The BrainBusters really haven't proven themselves."

BEST PICTURES - 1. TBS, for shot of Abdullah the Butcher eating podium. 2. WWF, for Valentine-Harts brawl. 3. TBS, shot of Steiner sitting in crowd, yelling "Retard-O" at Rotunda. 4. MEMPHIS, Stud Stable brawl.

BEST AUDIO - TBS, for Dennis Condrey shouting, "Come on, Bobby," before decking Jerry Price.

ALL-CLICHE TEAM - David Crockett, "match made in heaven."

NICKNAME OF THE WEEK - Cornette, NWA PRO, for calling Simmons "Ben Johnson's first cousin."

BLOOPER AWARD - Lex Luger, TBS, for losing grip on Trent Knight during attempted powerslam.

BOO AWARD - LEARNING THE ROPES, for suggesting that a Larry Z vs. Masked Maniac contest had been "chosen by the fans as a 'dream match.'"

PARTING BLOWS

You can't get like Bigelow...but at least we had another decent angle in the Bigelow-Barry brawl on TBS....the NWA will probably foul this up but after George South's performance against Ric Flair Saturday, if he's handled right, he can't go back now to being just another jobber, otherwise, Flair really comes off embarrassed. That's the kind of match, pre-1984, that would inflate a young guy's career. Now, George ought to get a decent match against another jobber on the a.m. Angles are a good step but there still needs to be a match pitting pushed regulars in each hour on Sat.

Charlie Platt did some of the best Gordon Soliesque-takes Saturday I've heard in ages on CWF....The Bullet pulls off the mask on next week's CWF outing....Expect a BEST OF RIC FLAIR video from TBS soon, along with a RIC FLAIR book....In Portland, The Grappler & Abuda Dien have won the Pacific Northwest tag belts...Matt Borne has now turned heel as KING MATTHEW.

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